

Abstract Submission	
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Abstract Title	MASS MEDIA AND THE CULTIVATION OF RISK PERCEPTIONS, HELPLESSNESS AND BEHAVIORAL UNCERTAINTY IN CANCER RISK
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Abstract Body	<p>This project investigates the relationship of mass media and demographic characteristics with perceptions of cancer risk, feelings of helplessness and behavioral uncertainty. Classic studies in risk communication have demonstrated that elevated perceptions of risk, in the absence of clear suggestions for action, can lead to feelings of helplessness, paralysis in decision-making and negative health outcomes. Less well known is the role that mass mediated information has in contributing to such perceptions. The data for this study come from the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS), a probability based sample of 6369 respondents who were asked about their need for, access to, and use of cancer-relevant information. Over 50% of the sample agreed with the statement that it seemed like "everything caused cancer," (a measure of diffuse risk perception); 29% agreed that "you can't lower your chances of getting cancer," (an indication of helplessness); and over 75% agreed that there were "too many recommendations to know which ones to follow," (an indication of behavioral uncertainty). People with lower education and income were more likely to agree with all three statements. Media variables also appear to play a significant role. Television viewing was positively associated with risk perception and helplessness. Low attention to health and medical information was associated with higher likelihood of agreeing that they could not lower their risk of cancer and that there are too many cancer recommendations. Future investigation will examine the strength of these relationships, and will investigate the development of causal models to predict health outcomes from mass mediated information.</p>

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